

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003278

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/PMBS, INR/EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/15/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PONDERING A "TRANSITIONAL COUNCIL" PROPOSAL

REF: A. MANILA 3251

[B](#). MANILA 3200

[C](#). MANILA 3167

[D](#). MANILA 3093

Classified By: Political Officer Andrew McClearn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Some politicians have begun to look at a possible "transitional council" for the Philippines, notably Senator Ramon Magsaysay and Renato De Villa, then-President Ramos' Defense Secretary. Under this scheme, President Arroyo and Vice President De Castro would resign and let a caretaker regime take over. The proposal does not command widespread support in opposition ranks nor in the country as a whole. Mission continues to reiterate firm U.S. support for the rule of law, warning that we strongly oppose any extra-constitutional or extra-legal steps, including this idea. End Summary.

-----  
Magsaysay Their Guy?  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) Senator Ramon Magsaysay, who until recently had been a strong supporter of President Arroyo, met with Charge and poloff on July 13 to discuss the possible formation of a "transitional council." Magsaysay offered few details, but indicated that such a council, made up of "elder statesmen," would govern for a limited time following resignations of the President and Vice President to provide stability while pursuing major governmental reforms, including constitutional change. Magsaysay did not indicate whether he would be willing to serve on such a council or merely provide political support and legitimacy. Charge underlined U.S. support for the rule of law, while warning that the USG firmly opposed any extra-constitutional or extra-legal actions.

-----  
Temporary collegial presidency?  
-----

[1](#)3. (C) De Villa separately reviewed this proposal with poloff on July 14. The 70 year old De Villa, a retired general who also briefly served as Executive Secretary to Arroyo in 2001 but now heads the small anti-Arroyo Reporma party, claimed the transitional council proposal would provide the Philippines the best form of government until the situation was "regularized." He related that he and his supporters "want a fair and honest government, but in order to get there, we need a temporary caretaker government which can help reinsert dignity and honor in public service." According to De Villa, the council would take power after the resignations of Arroyo and De Castro and usher in "a rejuvenated democracy in no more than 1000 days," after which Filipinos would elect new leaders to move beyond the transition. When queried, he claimed that the proposal was legal to implement because it would be put in place per the will of the "sovereign Filipino people" as set forth in the Constitution. De Villa admitted that the proposal was still in its embryonic stage, but pictured a council of 5-7 "credible" representatives serving in a "collegial presidency," while the existing executive branch remained largely intact. Both houses of Congress would be temporarily suspended under the proposal, along with a reconstitution in some form of the Supreme Court in order to cleanse the body of what he called "partisan justices." The council would then implement wholesale changes in the electoral system, the Civil Service Code, etc.

[1](#)4. (C) When asked what former President Ramos thought of his idea, De Villa replied, "he thinks I'm too radical, but he's never doubted my service to the nation." De Villa remarked that "selling the council" to the public would be difficult, but added that popular discontent with the political system was sufficient eventually to overcome opposition to the idea. De Villa said Reporma supporters of this proposal included the former Executive Secretary to then-president Corazon Aquino, Oscar Orbos. In a recent conversation with poloff, Orbos expressed extreme frustration with the prevailing "culture of political corruption" and insisted that the only way to resolve the RP's dilemma was "by stepping outside of

the box."

-----  
Support from Estrada crowd?  
-----

15. (C) In a July 15 discussion with poloff, Estrada supporter and former senator Francisco Tatad also said that such the council is needed to "clean up the decay in our institutions and create a small, lean government that will hasten our economic recovery." The council would give Filipinos a mechanism to change institutions, not just personalities, he said. Tatad claimed that over the past month many Estrada supporters had begun to look at De Villa as "an acceptable leader" who is qualified and serious: "De Villa could be marketed domestically." Tatad went on to claim that even former president Estrada (currently under house arrest as he is tried for plunder) is "now ready to cede the role of a provisional council leader to De Villa."

-----  
Comment  
-----

16. (C) The council proposal does not now command widespread support in opposition ranks nor in the country as a whole. It reflects another typically Filipino search for the "quick fix" led by "wise men." Its grounding in the Philippine Constitution seems extremely dubious. Mission will continue to reiterate firm U.S. support for the rule of law and to warn that we strongly oppose any extra-constitutional or extra-legal steps, including this idea.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified SIPRNET website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

You can also access this site through the State Department's  
Classified SIPRNET website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/>

MUSSOMELI